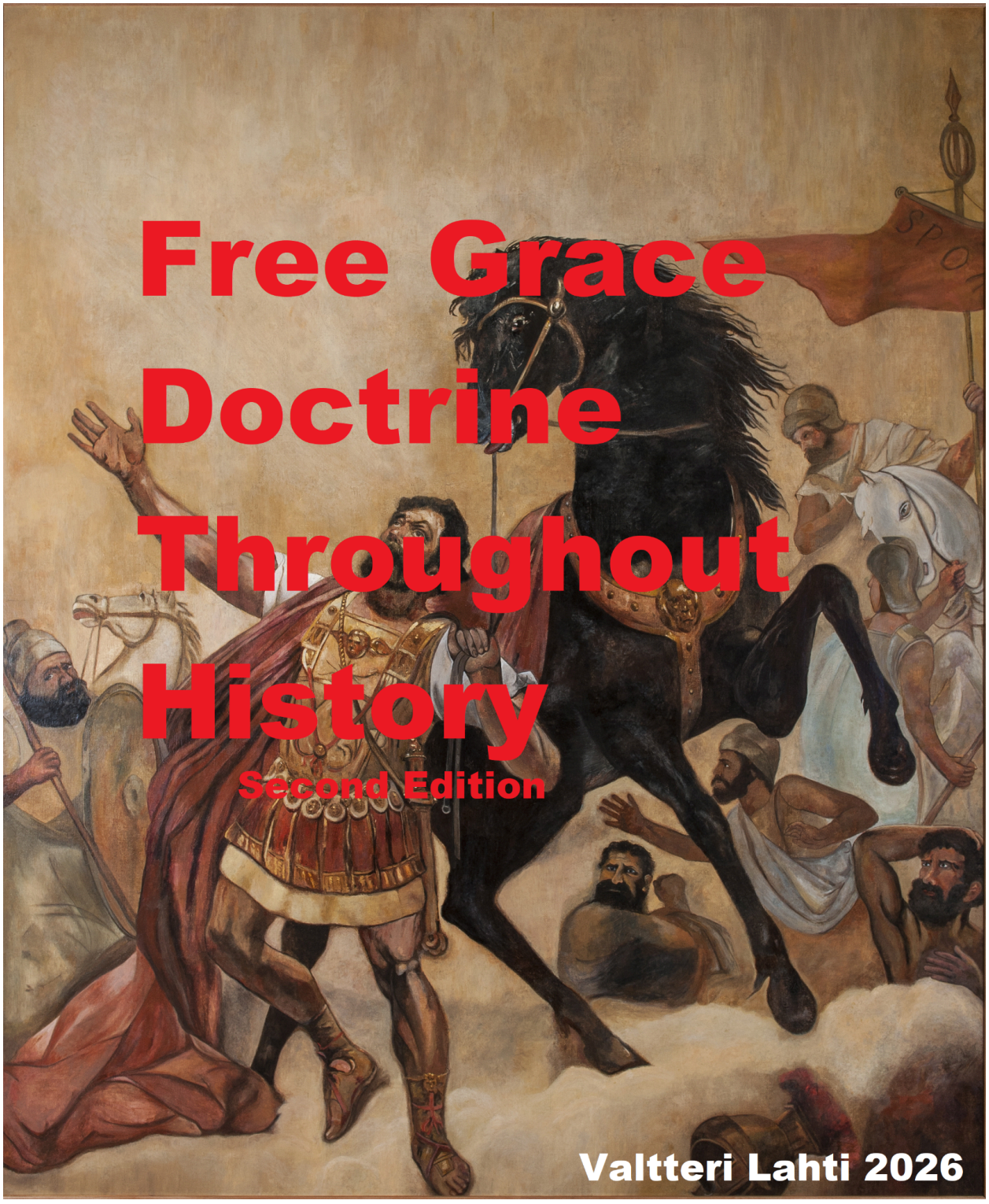

Free Grace Doctrine Throughout History

Second Edition

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Introduction

Free Grace theology teaches that salvation is received solely by believing in Jesus Christ. According to this Free Grace doctrine, neither good works nor perseverance in righteous deeds are required either before or after salvation to secure or maintain eternal life. Furthermore, it asserts that once a person is saved, the loss of salvation is impossible. This principle is clearly supported by numerous biblical passages affirming the permanence of salvation:

John 5:24
24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 6:37
37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

John 6:39
39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

John 10:28
28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

John 11:25-26

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

However, some critics argue that Free Grace is a modern innovation without historical roots. While Scripture alone serves as the foundation for Christian belief, some individuals may be alarmed by such claims. Nevertheless, this argument is not historically solid. For instance, in early church writings, including those of Augustine, it is revealed that an understanding of salvation by grace through faith alone, independent of works, did exist (note: Augustine did not teach Free Grace but mentioned the existence of a similar doctrine). Such individuals often centered their arguments on passages like 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 to affirm the doctrine of irrevocable salvation by grace.

In this book, I will first deal with Free Grace in the Bible, then moving into Free Grace ideas in the early church period, beginning in the pre-Nicene era and moving forward to the post-Nicene era. Afterward, I will examine examples of Free Grace ideas in the Reformation, moving forward until the 1980s, when the Lordship salvation controversy began. This book also shortly deals with the issues of baptismal regeneration, dispensationalism and the papacy within church history.

Quotations of the Bible in this book are all taken from the King James Version (KJV).

Free Grace in the Bible

In this chapter, I will begin by examining the clearest and most explicit affirmations of Free Grace Theology from the Bible. Free Grace Theology asserts that salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8), given freely through faith in Jesus Christ. This is a gift from God, which cannot be lost, and our good works do not determine if we get to heaven or not. However, God can still discipline unrighteous Christians in this life and our good works affect our degree of eternal rewards.

2 Timothy 2:13

13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

2 Timothy 2:13 is a very short but impactful verse. It uses the first person plural pronoun "we", if *we* believe not, thus Paul is speaking to Christians who already are Christians and have once believed in God. If they at some point stop believing, God will abide faithful. The next words "he cannot deny himself" expounds upon these words. For God to throw a person into hell who has been sealed with the Holy Ghost (Ephesians 1:13-14) would be to go against his own word, which is contrary to his own nature.

Eternal rewards In 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

The Bible also makes it clear that good works do not determine our salvation, even if they affect our degree of reward. This is especially evident in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15, which states:

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.
11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;
13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.
14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.
15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

These verses are of particular interest, since we have much evidence that there was a movement within the very early church that centered its arguments for the possibility of the salvation of the carnal Christian around this passage. These verses build a contrast between the Christian whose works are righteous, which are done through Christ through a proper motivation (who will receive eternal rewards), and the Christian who has lived an unrighteous life but has believed in Christ (who will lose eternal rewards but will still enter heaven).

It is very noteworthy that the passage explicitly clarifies that even the one whose work is burned (referring to a fruitless life, whose works did not amount to any value) is still said to be saved, as the

passage reads: "*but he himself shall be saved*." Although the Christian who failed in his Christian life is still saved, he will experience loss of reward.

In this chapter, Paul writes that the man who builds upon the foundation of Christ with precious metals such as gold and silver will have his work rewarded, while those who do not will suffer loss, yet will themselves be saved. In its plain reading, this verse says that although those who fail in the Christian life will suffer a loss of reward, they will still be saved and enter the millennial kingdom. However, there are multiple alternative interpretations often posited by those who reject the doctrine of eternal security. Here I will briefly analyze how these verses are treated by those who do not hold to Free Grace theology, and their shortcomings.

The Catholic interpretation

The Catholics interpret this verse as a proof of purgatory, emphasizing the phrase "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire", arguing that the fire described in the text is purgatory by fire. However, there are several grammatical issues with this interpretation, particularly as the "yet so as by fire" (οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός) in the text is not referring to the burning of the individual, but of the works, as Paul just previously said "If any man's work shall be burned", emphasizing that the work, not the person is burned. Although some may argue that the burning of the work necessarily includes the person who did those works in it, that is not substantiated by the text itself, and adds an unnecessary assumption to the text. Additionally, the text explicitly calls the fire "revealing", as it reads "Every man's work shall be

made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire". Catholic purgatory is not testing or revealing, but purifying.

Thus, the grammar does not simply permit the Catholic interpretation of this text, the fire reveals what one has done, not purifying the person from venial sins.

The Chrysostomian interpretation

John Chrysostom, a 4th to 5th century early Christian writer proposed a highly difficult understanding of this verse to avoid the implication of eternal security. This may be due to the existence of individuals emphasizing this passage to teach the idea that even those who fall into sin will be saved (as Augustine mentioned such doctrine existed commonly in his day in his book City of God, though he was also critical of it). Chrysostom denied the implication of eternal security by assuming that the word "saved" is not referring to salvation from hell, but salvation from annihilation into non-existence, yet still being damned to hell, as Chrysostom writes:

Wherefore he said, "He shall suffer loss:" lo, here is one punishment: "but he himself shall be saved, but so as by fire;" lo, again, here is a second. And his meaning is, "He himself shall not perish in the same way as his works, passing into nought, but he shall abide in the fire. (Homilies of Chrysostom, 1 Corinthians 3)

However, this is a highly difficult reading. There are no examples in the Bible where someone who still goes to hell is called "saved" (σωθήσεται). The word "will be saved" in the text is clearly said in

contrast to the negative judgement previously mentioned (the burning of the works). The contrast makes it inconceivable that the word "saved" is not used in a positive sense, of being able to enter into the presence of the Father despite this loss. Thus, this interpretation is impossible

John Calvin's understanding

Though not written polemically, John Calvin's view does unintentionally undermine the Free Grace understanding of this specific passage, as he understood the precious metals as only referring to doctrine, not Christian life generally, as he wrote:

By gold, then, and silver, and precious stones, he means doctrine worthy of Christ, and of such a nature as to be a superstructure corresponding to such a foundation. Let us not imagine, however, that this doctrine is apart from Christ, but on the contrary let us understand that we must continue to preach Christ until the very completion of the building. Only we must observe order, so as to begin with general doctrine, and more essential articles, as the foundations, and then go on to admonitions, exhortations, and everything that is requisite for perseverance, confirmation, and advancement. (Calvin's commentary, 1 Corinthians 3)

Thus, under John Calvin's view, the one saved "yet as by fire", is not a Christian who failed to live a Christian life, but someone who taught the gospel but mixed it with human philosophy. However, the Bible presents the judgement seat of Christ as dealing with both teaching and good works generally. There is no contextual separation in the text between works that build up the ministry

generally, and good teaching. On the contrary, the passage resists such restriction, the appeal to ἕκαστος ('every man') establishes a universal principle, not a specialized warning for the teachers of the church.

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 remains a strong text for Free Grace theology, as it explicitly teaches the possibility of the salvation of the 'carnal Christian', someone who failed in the Christian life and did not produce fruit worthy of reward, yet will be in the presence of the Father nevertheless due to his status as someone who has been saved by Christ, though with an eternal loss of reward. Loss of reward is real, but loss of salvation is not in view.

Ezekiel 44:10-16

10 And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity.

11 Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them.

12 Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; therefore have I

lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity.

13 And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed.

14 But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein.

15 But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God:

16 They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.

This is a longer passage, and often neglected. However, this is an explicit affirmation of eternal security in the Old Testament. The context of Ezekiel 44:10-16 is that of the millennial reign, as the whole of the end of Ezekiel deals with that.

The passage is important because it shows that even the unrighteous Levites who abandoned God were still let into the millennium (thus they did not lose their salvation and did not enter hell), although they lost their reward. Ezekiel 44:10-11 describes this judgement on the unrighteous Levites. Although these Levites were saved and are going to spend eternity with Jesus, they lost their right to minister in the temple, and have to have lesser roles.

This passage is very important, because it shows that even the apostate Levites were not thrown into hell by God. Although our eternal rewards are affected by our works, God will not throw anyone who believes into hell. Even these Levites who lived carnally and abandoned God were not sent into hell. And although the righteous Levites described in verses 15-16 gained more rewards than the unrighteous Levites by being able to minister in the temple, both groups are going to spend eternity with Jesus.

Revelation 22:17

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life <u>freely</u>.

The references to thirst and the water are obviously metaphorical for God's grace. But of specific focus is the word "freely" (δωρεάν). In both English and Greek, the word specifically refers to something without merit or payment. It is described thus that we can partake in salvation without any cost on our part. We do not need to give our good works as payment for salvation to God, but God gives his grace to us freely through just faith.

Apostasy and salvation?

Many Christians today hold the belief that anyone who abandons the faith is destined for eternal damnation in hell. In most denominations today, it is often asserted that such a person has

either lost their salvation or was never truly saved in the first place. This assumption, however, arises from a misunderstanding of several key biblical warnings. These passages are frequently read as threats of eternal condemnation, when in reality they concern the loss of spiritual reward, temporal discipline, and the forfeiture of fellowship with God rather than salvation itself.

However, in stark contrast to most views of salvation, Free Grace theology traditionally asserts that even those who fall into apostasy may be saved and enter heaven if they have once believed, and as I will demonstrate in this article, Scripture makes it clear that while apostasy is indeed possible, it does not result in the forfeiture of one's salvation.

Among the strongest evidences that Paul did not treat apostasy as something that can make you lose your standing in Christ is the Galatian church. That church was the recipient of Paul's letter to the Galatians, and as is evident within the letter, these Christians had fallen into a false gospel of works, as Paul states in Galatians 3:1 '*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?*' The Galatians had been misled by false teachers into believing that salvation could be earned by keeping the Mosaic law, leading them to apostasy. Yet despite this, Paul unmistakably affirms their genuine salvation. In Galatians 3:2, he reminds them that they had received the Holy Spirit, which is clear evidence that they were true believers, not mere pretenders. Furthermore, in Galatians 6:1, Paul addresses them as "brethren," a term he reserves exclusively for the saved, thus reaffirming their present standing in Christ.

This is consistent with Paul's language elsewhere in his letters, such as 2 Timothy 2:13, where Paul writes 'If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.'. The "we" is obviously referring to Christians, as Paul was including himself in the group. Notice however, that Paul says that even in such cases, God will stay faithful to us.

However, there are also multiple other examples which challenge the claim that apostates were never truly saved, as we see that King Solomon, the author of 3 Biblical books experienced apostasy, as 1 Kings 11:4 records his fall to paganism: 'For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.' While Reformed theology argues that this was merely a temporary apostasy, this still places multiple questions on the Reformed system: why would God allow temporary apostasy but not apostasy until the end of one's life? What if Solomon had died earlier, would that have proven him unsaved? If you interpret the Biblical warnings about apostasy to be about eternal damnation, where do you see an exception for temporal apostasy in those verses?

Simply, it is explicitly clear from the Bible that apostasy is warned about, however it also explicitly affirms the doctrine of eternal security, as seen in Hebrews 13:5 '*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*.' and John 10:28 '*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand*.' among many other verses. It would not make sense for Scripture

to repeatedly warn against something that is impossible. Just as it would be absurd for a father to warn his son not to jump to the moon, a thing no human could do, so too, for God to warn against apostasy implies that falling away is a genuine possibility. The warnings, then, are meaningful because they address a real spiritual risk. But what about the warning passages themselves? The most commonly used one is Hebrews 6, which reads:

4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:

8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

However, the warning can be understood through the agricultural parable, which illustrates renewal through the burning. The field symbolizes a person who has become unfruitful, the thorns and briers representing bad fruits, and the burning signifies God's corrective judgment. In ancient agriculture, farmers would burn

unproductive fields so that they could later become fertile and produce a healthy crop. Similarly, divine judgment acts like the farmer's burning: it enables the unfruitful or wayward individual to be restored and bear good fruit once more.

Thus, the "impossibility" of repentance mentioned in the passage should be understood as a human impossibility, these people would be beyond reach through outreach, leading to inevitable divine judgement. However, just like the burning of a field, this judgement enables the apostate to bear fruit again. This verse should not be understood as a threat of eternal damnation, but of temporal discipline.

Another warning, which exists in Hebrews 10, is often used to imply the possibility of someone losing their salvation. The passage reads thus:

> *26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,*
>
> *27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*
>
> *28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:*
>
> *29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he*

was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Advocates of conditional security present multiple arguments from this text of Scripture, and admittedly many of the points can be highly confusing. First, they often assert that "sinning willfully" refers to a persistent habit of sin. Second, they interpret the punishment mentioned as eternal separation in hell. Third, they argue that the "reward" references eternal salvation. However, a closer examination of the context in Hebrews reveals that these interpretations are not the necessary understanding of the passage.

To begin with, the "willful sin" mentioned in the text does not contextually refer to habitual sin. Instead, it pertains to the deliberate act of returning to the system of animal sacrifices, as indicated by the surrounding context in verses 22–25. The entire book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were struggling with the temptation to revert to the practices of Judaism and go back to the animal sacrifices of Judaism, which were only a type of Christ.

Secondly, it is under no necessity that references to "judgement" and "punishment" need to be understood of as eternal hell, instead they can be understood as God's temporary discipline upon the apostate Christian:

> *Revelation 3:19 - As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

God's temporary judgements can in severe cases be much sorer than immediate death (as was the penalty under the Mosaic law), we can see this for example in the case of Jonah, where Jonah pleads that he would rather die than live:

> *Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. (Jonah 4:3)*

Thus, the punishment being referred to as being worse than immediate death does not under any circumstance necessitate that hell is being talked about (otherwise one would have to consistently argue that Jonah was in hell in Jonah 4:3, which is obviously not the case).

Some object to the interpretation of "punishment" in Hebrews 10 by saying that the Greek word used, *timōria*, is not the typical term for punishment found elsewhere in Scripture. They cite Aristotle, who argued that *timōria* always refers to a form of punishment devoid of any corrective or disciplinary intent. However, this definition reflects Aristotle's philosophical framework rather than the usage of the term in Jewish contexts, which aligns with the English term "punishment".

For example, in 2 Maccabees 6:12, although an apocryphal text, it provides insight into how Greek was used by Jewish writers. In this writing, *timōria* is employed to describe temporal discipline rather than purely retributive punishment in hell. While 2 Maccabees is not Scripture, it demonstrates that the Jewish understanding of *timōria* could encompass corrective discipline, contradicting Aristotle's philosophical distinction.

Thus, the meaning of *timōria* in Hebrews 10 should be understood in its Jewish context rather than through the lens of Greek philosophy.

We also see in Jeremiah the usage of the language of “punishment” for God’s corrective discipline:

> *11 For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet I will not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. (Jeremiah 30:11)*

Most of these philosophical arguments on the meaning of *timōria* and the concept of punishment are made by Reformed/Calvinistic commentators, yet these are foreign distinctions being imposed into the Scriptures. And contrary to the arguments of Calvinists who believe that those who fall away were "never saved to begin with" and the Arminians who argue that this passage refers to a loss of salvation, the immediate context itself suggests that temporary discipline is the theme of the passage, as only two chapters later, the author writes about discipline (Hebrews 12:6-10):

> *6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*
>
> *7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*
>
> *8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*
>
> *9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

> *10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

Lastly, the "reward" mentioned in Hebrews 10 should not be interpreted as referring to salvation. The Bible consistently describes salvation as a gift (Ephesians 2:8), and by definition, a gift cannot be a reward, as rewards are earned, while gifts are given freely. Instead, Scripture makes a clear distinction between salvation and eternal rewards. Thus, Hebrews 10 gives the audience a clear explanation of the consequences of apostasy and the benefits of persevering. The person who chooses to go back to the animal sacrifices will experience severe divine discipline, but the person who perseveres will receive an eternal reward. Hence, loss of salvation is not the topic of Hebrews 10, but instead discipline and reward.

Early Christianity

Early Christianity is typically divided into two major eras: the “Ante-Nicene” era, which refers to the time before the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), and the “Post-Nicene” era, which encompasses the period following the council but before the 8th century. When it comes to the topic of salvation, the Ante-Nicene church fathers tended to address it less explicitly, and their writings on salvation are sometimes ambiguous. In contrast, discussions about salvation became more prominent and contentious in the Post-Nicene period, thus more explicit references can be found. Despite these differences, examples of Free Grace theology can be identified in both eras.

Ante-Nicene

Within the earliest early church writings, we have general references to justification by faith alone from multiple Christian writers, such as Polycarp (2nd century), Clement of Rome (1st century), Mathetes (2nd century) and the more unknown Odes of Solomon (1st-2nd century). The following quotes seem to imply some kind of understanding of faith alone:

All these, therefore, were highly honoured, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but through the operation of His will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Clement's Letter to the Corinthians)

In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? O sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners (Epistle to Diognetus/Mathetes)

In whom, though now you see Him not, you believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that by grace you are

saved, not of works, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ. (Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians)

Many of these early Christians are very ambiguous, as these letters were not written as theological treatises. For example, although Polycarp mentions salvation by faith without works, he later exhorts his audience to do good works to reign with Christ. Might Polycarp have distinguished reigning from salvation? Maybe, but we cannot be certain. However, the late 1st century to early 2nd century writing "Odes of Solomon", likely written by an Essene convert to Christianity seems to make some statements that more strongly may imply eternal security. Consider these following quotes:

Ode 4:13 For that which You gave, You gave freely, so that no longer will You draw back and take them again.

Ode 5:3 Freely did I receive Your grace, may I live by it.

Ode 4:3 The ancient one shall not be perverted by those which are inferior to it. You have given Your heart, O Lord, to Your believers.

Ode 29:5-6 And I humbled my enemies, and He justified me by His grace. For I believed in the Lord's Messiah, and considered that He is the Lord.

Ode 17:2 And I was justified by my Lord, for my salvation is incorruptible.

Ode 25: 12 And I was justified by His kindness, and His rest is for ever and ever. Hallelujah.
(The Odes of Solomon. Translated by James H. Charlesworth. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.)
In addition to affirming that salvation is by grace, not of works, the writing seems to affirm the finality of salvation by describing it as "incorruptible" and by his statement that "no longer will You draw back and take them again". The Odes may be the earliest possible writing that may be understood as teaching eternal security outside the New Testament.
Although the Odes are perhaps the best candidate to teach eternal security within the very first centuries of Christianity, it is still not as clear as it could be.

However, we are not limited to ambiguous references in the Ante-Nicene era regarding the doctrine of Free Grace, as the writings of Origen (who was born in the year 185 and died in the year 253) seem to explicitly address and mention the idea within early Christian history. This fact is even acknowledged by Catholic scholars who are staunchly opposed to Free Grace soteriology, who wrote that Origen was aware of Christians who were not Gnostic, yet still taught the doctrine of eternal security:

[Origen] rejects the view that justification is by faith alone, apparently because certain Christians were denying a future judgment based upon works
In 8.2 Origen again shows awareness of persons who do not seem to be heretics, but who do not understand the inextricable link between faith and good works. He refers to them as he

expounds Rom 10.9, where it is evident that Origen rejects their theology, insisting that belief in Christ's resurrection and public confession of his lordship profits one nothing if his resurrection is not realized in the life of the believer (Origen; Scheck, Thomas P. (2009). Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5. Washington, DC: CUA Press. ISBN 978-0-8132-1736-9.)

In this observation, Scheck writes that Origen had a clear awareness of those early Christians who separated faith from works, acknowledging that these were not Gnostic heretics. Although Origen rejected the view that faith alone, without a corresponding change in life and works, could guarantee salvation. This shows that he was nevertheless aware of the existence of individuals who taught that salvation was not determined by one's good works.

An example of Origen's direct engagement with the Free Grace idea can be found in his commentary on Romans 10:9, where he writes:

For through this [Romans 10:9] it will seem to some that even if a person lacks the advantages of good works, even if he fails to put forth effort for the virtues, nevertheless, by this, that he has believed, he would not perish but would be saved and would possess salvation, even though he would be unable to possess the glory of blessedness." (Origen: Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans, Books 6-10 [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2002], p. 139, section 8:2:7 in the commentary)

This passage directly addresses a concept that aligns with Free Grace doctrine: that salvation is a gift through faith alone, and not conditioned upon good works either as a pre or a post-requisite. Origen seems to know individuals who seem to have believed that if a person has faith in Christ, then despite their lack of good works or spiritual growth, they would still be saved.

What is especially significant here is that Origen, although he firmly rejects Free Grace doctrine, appears to have been aware of its early proponents and their argumentation. His rejection of this doctrine does not seem to be based on a lack of familiarity with it but on his own theological framework, which was influenced by his allegorical method of interpretation and Platonic philosophy. Nevertheless his discussion implies that there were indeed early Christians who taught that salvation could be obtained through faith alone, with works playing a role solely in determining the degree of reward in eternity but not if a person is saved or not. The similarity between Origen's description and the Free Grace position is striking, as he identifies the same idea that good works are not necessary for salvation, but are instead relevant for eternal reward.

In his writing, Origen describes the scenario where an individual, even though they fail to live in a life characterized by good works, can still be saved due to their belief in Christ, yet not experiencing the "glory of blessedness" — a term used by Origen to refer to a lesser reward in the afterlife. This clearly aligns with the Free Grace perspective, where salvation is seen as a gift received through faith alone, while works are seen as impacting only the rewards received in eternity, not the salvation itself. It is

remarkable that Origen's awareness of this early theological position is so clear, demonstrating that Free Grace theology was not a modern invention but had roots in the early Christian period.

This historical context helps to show the early existence of Free Grace ideas throughout Christian history, showing that this Free Grace is not a modern novelty but has had a presence since the early centuries of the church.

However, we also see evidence of multiple Christians teaching salvation without works from Origen's pagan opponent Celsus, who although saying it in a mocking tone, claimed that Christians teach that 'just believing' is what gets one to heaven, as is recorded in Origen's against celsus:

"And he asserts that certain persons who do not wish either to give or receive a reason for their belief, keep repeating, 'Do not examine, but believe!' and, 'Your faith will save you!'" (Against Celsus 1:9)

"If these bring forward this person, and others, again, a different individual, while the common and ready cry of all parties is, 'Believe, if thou wilt be saved, or else begone,' what shall those do who are in earnest about their salvation? Shall they cast the dice, in order to divine whither they may betake themselves, and whom they shall join?" (Against Celsus 6:11)

Although Celsus is primarily putting his focus on the apparent fideism of some Christians, note how in the same reference he

says ‘*but believe!' and, 'Your faith will save you!'*, referring to soteriology. Although some will argue that

Post-Nicene

The post-Nicene era is in many ways completely different from the Ante-Nicene era. During this time, the union of state and church began to form. This era (especially in the west) was marked by departure from many earlier Ante-Nicene views, such as in the popularity of infant baptism. Although certain individuals such as Origen and Cyprian did teach infant baptism during the Ante-Nicene era, it was vehemently opposed by Tertullian (155 – c. 220), writing “*the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children*” (On Baptism). However, the influences of Augustine formed most of western theology, whose doctrines on infant baptism, original sin, predestination and soteriology characterized by a mixture of faith and works took hold. Nevertheless, during his day, it is evident that eternal security that did not necessarily result in a life of obedience was common teaching in his day, as his writings themselves bear witness.

Augustine vehemently opposed the notion of carnal Christians attaining salvation solely through faith, yet he acknowledged that many people disagreed with him on the issue. He highlighted this stance in his writings, including his treatise "On Faith and Works" and "The City of God". We find quotes in Augustine such as:

But, say they, the catholic Christians have Christ for a foundation, and they have not fallen away from union with Him, no matter how depraved a life they have built on this foundation, as wood, hay,

stubble; and accordingly the well-directed faith by which Christ is their foundation will suffice to deliver them some time from the continuance of that fire, though it be with loss, since those things they have built on it shall be burned. (1 Corinthians 3:15) - (City of God, Book 21)

(The Latin term "catholicus" translated as "catholic" did not yet refer to the Roman Catholic church, but was a designation the early Christians used to describe someone who they believed to be a part of the body of Christ. This is as in Latin, the words “universal” and “catholic” were not distinguished)

Augustine even mentions people who taught that even those who lapse into heresy will be saved:

“But let us now reply to those who promise deliverance from eternal fire, not to the devil and his angels (as neither do they of whom we have been speaking), nor even to all men whatever, but only to those who have been washed by the baptism of Christ, and have become partakers of His body and blood, no matter how they have lived, no matter what heresy or impiety they have fallen into" (City of God, Book 21)

The mention of baptism and partaking in Christ's body and blood invites discussion about their spiritual significance. While many associate these terms with sacramental practices, in light of passages like 1 Corinthians 12:13 and John 6:35, they can also be understood as pictures for being born again and belief in Christ rather than sacramental acts.

He repeated the same point again in His book "On Faith and Works":

"But the reason why our opponents think that the one person may be admitted, but not the other, is this: they think that these persons are saved, although by fire, if they believe in Christ.... They are saved, so they think, even though they do not correct their evil ways" Augustine, Saint (1847). Seventeen short treatises of S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Wellesley College Library. Oxford : J. H. Parker ; London : F. and J. Rivington

Augustine thus mentions the belief that one may live carnally yet go to heaven. As we see, their main arguments came from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, using the same passage Free Grace theologians today use.
However, some have argued that the individuals Augustine is referring to were not Free Grace in their doctrine, as they taught that almsgiving instead of faith is what delivers from eternal hell. This fails to consider the context where Augustine addresses multiple different groups who all taught that carnal Christians may be saved. It is evident that Augustine is not only referring to those who teach that almsgiving gives eternal security, as he writes:
I have <u>also</u> met with some who are of opinion that such only as neglect to cover their sins with almsdeeds shall be punished in everlasting fire; and they cite the words of the Apostle James, He shall have judgment without mercy who has shown no mercy. James 2:13 Therefore, say they, he who has not amended his ways, but yet has intermingled his profligate and wicked actions with works of mercy, shall receive mercy in the judgment, so that

he shall either quite escape condemnation (City of God, Chapter 22, Book XXI)

Notice the word “also”. By using this term, he is distinguishing this doctrine from those other beliefs mentioned. It is true that *some* in Augustine’s day believed that almsgiving will guarantee eternal salvation, however Augustine is not describing uniform groups, but multiple independent individuals with differing opinions, only being united by the claim that Christians who fail to be obedient may still be saved and enter heaven.

Augustine tries to critique these ideas by writing the following:

Now, if the wicked man were to be saved by fire on account of his faith only, and if this is the way the statement of the blessed Paul should be understood—"But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" —then faith without works would be sufficient to salvation. But then what the apostle James said would be false. And also false would be another statement of the same Paul himself: "Do not err," he says; "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the unmanly, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God." Now, if those who persist in such crimes as these are nevertheless saved by their faith in Christ, would they not then be in the Kingdom of God? (Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love, translated by Philip Schaff)

Augustine thus argued that faith alone cannot be true because of Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which reads:

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

However, what he does not understand is that Paul is speaking in positional terms. Although a Christian can do all of those sins mentioned, they still have the imputed righteousness of Christ, which makes them positionally righteous in the eyes of God. This is confirmed by the statement in verse 11, using the past tense "such were some of you". Paul is speaking to the exact same people he called carnal in the same exact book: "*For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*" (1 Corinthians 3:3). If anything, this confirms Free Grace doctrine, as the exact same people he called washed, justified and sanctified were living carnally. Augustine was known to have rejected the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ, which led him to teach this doctrine of salvation by works.

Nevertheless, in the days of Augustine, the view that a carnal Christian may be saved was seemingly common. However, as Augustine's influence was very strong this position seems to have

slowly died. Although we should not assume that all of those of whom Augustine talks were correct on salvation, as he discusses a wide range of people.

It may be objected that all of these individuals were fringe, as none of their writings have survived to our day. Although this may be due to scribal bias (zealous Augustinian scribes would not be willing to copy the writings of his opponents). It must also be noted that most early Christian writings are no longer preserved for us. Nevertheless, it seems like some Christian writers who taught something alike Free Grace may have survived. According to some historians, Jerome (347 – 420) argued that the devils and the ones who never believe in Christ will end up in eternal damnation, however those who believe in Christ will enter heaven unconditionally. It has also been argued that Ambrose taught something similar. The non-Free Grace Patristic scholar John Norman Davidson Kelly in his book "Early Christian Doctrines" comments on the soteriology of Jerome, saying:
"Jerome develops the same distinction, stating that, while the Devil and the impious who have denied God will be tortured without remission, those who have trusted in Christ, even if they have sinned and fallen away, will eventually be saved. Much the same teaching appears in Ambrose, developed in greater detail." (John Norman Davidson Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, second edition (Harper & Row publishers, 1960)"

This is even admitted by the Roman Catholic scholar Gregory Lombardo, who in his translation of Augustine's work *On Faith and Works* wrote the following:

Augustine, however, does not mention any names, and there is no evidence either here or in any other place that he is referring to these passages from the works of Jerome. Nevertheless, both Jerome and Ambrose seemed to have shared in the not uncommon error of their time, namely, that all Christians would sooner or later be reunited to God, an error which Augustine refutes here and in a number of other places (Augustine; Lombardo, Gregory J. (1988). On Faith and Works. New York, NY: Paulist Press. ISBN 978-0-8091-0406-2.)

Individuals teaching salvation by faith alone were additionally still mentioned by Caesarius of Arles (470-542ad), who wrote the following:

For many say: I believe; and they think that faith alone without good works is sufficient. (Sermon 186:1, in Mary Magdeleine Mueller, trans., St. Caesarius: Sermons, Volume II [81-186] [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964], 490).)

The example of Caesarius shows that there were “many” who taught that someone who has faith but not works is still saved. This also lends evidence to the claim that not all of those who taught the salvation of carnal believers is through baptism, as Caesarius only mentions faith.

Among the early Christian thinkers, Jovinian (died 405 AD) is a fascinating person whose fragmentary writings may hint at an early understanding of eternal security, though the evidence from his incomplete writings is limited. Church historian Philip Schaff

speculated that Jovinian could have gravitated toward a concept akin to the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, although without tying it to divine determinism. Although, Jovinian's statement that "Those who are once born again with full faith by (spiritual) baptism cannot be overcome by the devil" suggests a belief in the permanence of justification, this does not necessarily affirm the Calvinistic idea that all justified individuals will persevere in faith until the end. As a Calvinist, Schaff may have gravitated more towards trying to tie early doctrines to his Calvinist presuppositions.

Instead, Jovinian's words may only imply that once justified, an individual cannot lose their standing before God, a concept more aligned with a basic understanding of eternal security, without delving into the nuances of ongoing faithfulness. His fragmented writings leave room for interpretation, making definitive conclusions challenging. However, it is plausible that Jovinian advocated an early version of eternal security.

Despite this, Jovinian diverged sharply from Free Grace views in his rejection of the concept of eternal rewards, a stance that drew strong criticism from contemporaries like Jerome. This particular belief may situate Jovinian closer to modern "Hyper-Grace" theology, which downplays the role of works and ongoing sanctification in the Christian life. Thus, while he might have held to eternal security, he did not fully align with Free Grace views.

Around the 4th to 5th centuries, Pseudo-Chrysostom expressed perspectives reminiscent of Free Grace theology. In his commentary on Matthew, he suggests that certain individuals who

enter the kingdom may be excluded from "reigning" with Christ. Pseudo-Chrysostom's stance thus implies the possibility of disobedient individuals attaining salvation:

But seeing that to break the least commandments and not to keep them are one and the same, why does He say above of him that breaks the commandments, that he shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven, and here of him who keeps them not, that he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven? … For a man to be in the kingdom is not to reign with Christ, but only to be numbered among Christ's people; what He says then of him that breaks the commandments is, that he shall indeed be reckoned among Christians, yet the least of them. But he who enters into the kingdom, becomes partaker of His kingdom with Christ. Therefore, he who does not enter into the kingdom of heaven, shall not indeed have a part of Christ's glory, yet shall he be in the kingdom of heaven (quoted by Dillow, Joseph (2014) in his book: Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings. Colorado Springs, CO: Paniym Group. p. 275), original from Saint Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, St. Matthew vol. 1, Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1874), 174

Pseudo-Chrysostom's understanding of Matthew is quite complex, but in essence he is arguing that the words "enter the kingdom" are sometimes used to refer to a reward of reign in the kingdom. Thus, he is distinguishing between the unrighteous who will have the lowest reward in the kingdom, and the righteous who have a high reward in the kingdom.

While Pseudo-Chrysostom is wrong to understand the word “enter the kingdom” in a rewards context (it means *enter* literally), not understanding that Matthew 5:20 speaks of imputed righteousness, not practical righteousness, he still makes a correct observation of the previous verse in Matthew 5:29, which shows that unrighteous believers still enter the kingdom, though being the least in the kingdom. It is not however certain from the text how he understood the details of the reign as a reward.

During Bede's lifetime (672-735), he would have encountered proponents of the Free Grace perspective. This is evident in his commentary on the Epistle of James, where he rebukes those advocating for Free Grace theology:

"*Although the apostle Paul preached that we are justified by faith without works, <u>those who understand</u> by this that it does not matter whether they live evil lives or do wicked and terrible things, as long as they believe in Christ, because salvation is through faith, have made a great mistake. James here expounds how Paul's words ought to be understood. This is why he uses the example of Abraham, whom Paul also used as an example of faith, to show that the patriarch also performed good works in the light of his faith. It is therefore wrong to interpret Paul in such a way as to suggest that it did not matter whether Abraham put his faith into practice or not. What Paul meant was that no one obtains the gift of justification on the basis of merit derived from works performed beforehand, because the gift of justification comes only from faith*." (Concerning the Epistle of St. James) (Bede (672/673-735), Gerald Bray, "Ancient Christian

Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI: James, 1-2Peter, 1-3 John, Jude")

Bede's use of the phrase "those who understand by this" clearly indicates his awareness of this doctrine being taught in his time. His disapproval of this belief highlights its existence alongside his criticism. Notably, the individuals Bede criticized do not align with the classical Reformed or Lutheran perspective of faith alone. He mentioned the belief that immoral conduct has no bearing on salvation, indicating the presence of individuals arguing for the salvation of even morally compromised Christians. However, Bede sadly misinterprets the book of James. Bede seems to think that faith alone gives “Initial salvation”, while works are necessary for “final salvation”, but this is not what James talks about. The word “justification” does not necessarily refer to the process of salvation, as we see in verses like

For instance Luke 7:35, which reads “*But wisdom is justified of all her children*.” In this verse, the word “justification” has the sense of *demonstrating* something visibly. This is also the likely meaning of “justification” in James 2:24, as: the context in James 2:18 seems to already set precedent for that “*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*” This aligns with what Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, which reads “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*.” Thus, James is not saying that good works are necessary to be justified before God, but are necessary to be justified before man.

Despite almost all the previous mentions being from Western Christianity (as it seems Free Grace was primarily a Western doctrine), some Eastern writers, such as Chrysostom (347–407), addressed objections likely raised by early proponents of Free Grace ideology in several instances, as evidenced in his commentary on John.

"He that believeth on the Son, is not judged." He that "believeth," not he that is over-curious: he that "believeth," not the busybody. But what if his life be unclean, and his deeds evil? It is of such as these especially that Paul declares, that they are not true believers at all"

"Is it then enough, says one, to believe in the Son, that one may have eternal life? By no means."

Chrysostom's responses suggest a rebuttal to arguments advocating for salvation based only on faith, drawing from the Gospel of John. This indicates his awareness of such arguments circulating, implying the existence of Free Grace doctrine in his day.

These excerpts from Chrysostom's commentary can be seen as early confrontations with a doctrine emphasizing faith in Christ as the only requirement for salvation. Proponents of Free Grace doctrine maintain that salvation is a gift received through faith alone, without the necessity of righteous living or moral deeds as a condition to have eternal life.

Chrysostom’s critique reflects a common misunderstanding among opponents of Free Grace, who often equate it with endorsing immoral living. However, Free Grace theology asserts

that while good works and righteous living are important for discipleship, they are not prerequisites for salvation. Salvation, according to this view, is entirely a result of God's grace and cannot be earned by human effort.

Additionally, the critiques of John Chrysostom against Free Grace theology were very shallow and without content, as we see in his commentary where he on the statement Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 3:15, which reads: "*If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire*." This is an explicit affirmation that a person whose works are worthless may still be saved and enter heaven. However, Chrysostom in trying to argue against Free Grace horrendously twists the words of Paul, writing:

"Wherefore he said, "He shall suffer loss:" lo, here is one punishment: "but he himself shall be saved, but so as by fire;" lo, again, here is a second. And his meaning is, "He himself shall not perish in the same way as his works, passing into nought, but he shall abide in the fire."

Chrysostom thus argues that the words "he himself shall be saved, yet as by fire" to mean "he will not experience annihilation, but have eternal hellfire". Thus, Chrysostom's chief argument is that the word "save" is used in a negative connotation to refer to punishment instead of deliverance from hell. But that is totally non contextual and adds to the text what it does not say. There are no examples in the letters of Paul where the word "saved" has a negative connotation as Chrysostom argues. In fact, I am aware of no passages whatsoever where the words "save" or "salvation" are used to refer to punishment. What is happening in the text is that the works themselves are tried by fire (verse 13), and the

person whose works are unprofitable will have their works burned and lose their reward but still enter heaven. However, Chrysostom's interpretation is massively inconsistent, imposing unbiblical theology into the text (eisegesis). Nevertheless, his long attempt to "refute" eternal security implies his knowledge of such doctrines being taught.

Decline

It seems like the idea that carnal Christians may be saved was somewhat common in early Christianity, although primarily due to Augustine's influence, such ideas began to be viewed more negatively. With the influence of Augustine, ideas such as unconditional election, infant damnation and original sin began to be widely taught, especially in the west. However, many of these ideas were influenced by Manichean Gnosticism, as Augustine in his own writings admits being a former Manichaean convert:

My eagerness after the writings of Manichæus having thus received a check, and despairing even more of their other teachers — seeing that in sundry things which puzzled me, he, so famous among them, had thus turned out — I began to occupy myself with him in the study of that literature which he also much affected, and which I, as Professor of Rhetoric, was then engaged in teaching the young Carthaginian students, and in reading with him either what he expressed a wish to hear, or I deemed suited to his bent of mind. But all my endeavours by which I had concluded to improve in that sect, by acquaintance with that man, came completely to an end: not that I separated myself altogether from them, but, as one who could find nothing better, I determined in the meantime upon contenting myself with what I had in any

way lighted upon, unless, by chance, something more desirable should present itself. (The Confessions (Book V)

Although Augustine left Manichaean Gnosticism, often people do not lose all their influences from the past. This is evident in his doctrine of predestination, which was previously only held by the Gnostics, as even Chrysostom writes:

Ver. 44. "No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw Him." The Manichaeans spring upon these words, saying, "that nothing lies in our own power"; yet the expression showeth that we are masters of our will. "For if a man cometh to Him," saith some one, "what need is there of drawing?" But the words do not take away our free will, but show that we greatly need assistance. And He implieth not an unwilling [1287] comer, but one enjoying much succor. Then He showeth also the manner in which He draweth; for that men may not, again, form any material idea of God, He addeth, (Homilies on John)

Notice how Chrysostom writes that the Gnostics used the exact same text (John 6:44) as Augustine and the Calvinists used for their doctrine of election. However, even prior to Manichaeism, it is evident that other Gnostic sects such as the Basilidians held to this doctrine of unconditional election, as Clement of Alexandria wrote in the 2nd century:

Basilides' followers further say** that faith and election are both particular to individual dispositions, and consequently, that faith on a world scale in every being follows **from an election which lies beyond the world**; further, they say that the gift of faith is proportionate to the hope of each individual. 11 (1) **In that case,

faith is no longer the right action of a free choice*, a natural superiority; the person without faith is not responsible and will not meet his just consequences; the person with faith is not responsible; the whole essential difference between faith and unfaith could not be a matter of praise or blame if you look at it rightly, being a foreordaining natural necessity determined by the universal power. We are like lifeless puppets controlled by natural forces. It is a predetermining necessity which forces willingness34 and the lack of it. (Alexandria, Clement of (2010-04). Stromateis, Books 1–3 (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 85). CUA Press. ISBN 978-0-8132-1185-5. translated by John Ferguson, page 164)*

It is significant that Augustine, being the first non-Gnostic figure to advocate the core tenets of TULIP (the five points of Calvinism), was also a Manichaean in his past. By redefining election from being based on God's foreknowledge to a monergistic work of God, Augustine introduced the idea that regeneration must precede faith. This shift fundamentally challenges Free Grace theology, as the implication of Augustine’s denial of libertarian free will is the inevitability of perseverance in good works. This Augustinian framework influenced by Manichaeism became mainstream within medieval Christianity thus created an environment highly hostile to Free Grace, and this framework is the basis of John MacArthur’s Lordship salvation. However, from examples such as Bede, it seems that Free Grace did not completely vanish even in the middle ages where Augustine’s influence was major.

Conclusion

These facts show the early existence of Free Grace doctrine in early Christian history. Although Scripture is our final authority, and church history should not determine our beliefs authoritatively, this demonstrates the fact that Free Grace is not a new idea. While the accounts of Free Grace theology mainly come from hostile sources, this is likely due to the fact that as time progressed, Augustinian influence (which rejected the concept) caused their writings to stop being copied, as zealous Augustinian scribes would prefer not to spend long time copying treatises which are contrary to their ideas.

However, it should be still cautioned that not everyone who taught eternal security at this era were fully correct. As was already noted, some people erroneously taught that almsgiving will guarantee heaven no matter what other sins the person does.

It is also possible that some of them misunderstood Paul's statements to imply some kind of purgatory, where everyone who has believed in Christ will go, not just those of "venial sins", as Augustine writes concerning them in the book Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love thus:

"*It is not incredible that something like this should occur after this life, whether or not it is a matter for fruitful inquiry. It may be discovered or remain hidden whether some of the faithful are sooner or later to be saved by a sort of purgatorial fire, in proportion as they have loved the goods that perish, and in proportion to their attachment to them. However, this does not apply to those of whom it was said, "They shall not possess the Kingdom of God," unless their crimes are remitted through due repentance*" *(Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love, translated by Philip Schaff)*

This doctrine would of course be heretical, as it would deny the efficiency of the blood of Christ and should not be defended. However, how accurately Augustine understood their views, or if it was universal among them is not clear. No mentions of any kind of purgatory are found in Origen's commentary which mentions belief in eternal security, nor in the Odes of Solomon or in the context of Jovinian. Chrysostom's implicit mention of Free Grace objections also does not seem to

Baptismal regeneration?

A brief section will be dedicated to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. While many argue that this belief was universally taught until the 1500s, this view oversimplifies historical reality. Though baptismal regeneration was indeed popular in early Christianity, there were always groups and individuals who did not teach that baptism is essential for justification.

One issue for proponents of baptismal regeneration is that this doctrine seems absent from the very earliest Christian writings. While arguments from silence cannot be definitive, they raise important questions. For instance, why does the Didache, which includes a section on baptism, never mention it as salvific? Why does Clement consistently discuss salvation without including baptism as a requirement? In fact, Clement (c. 98 AD) explicitly states that faith alone is the condition for salvation: "We, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, understanding, godliness, or works wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through

which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

The question remains, why does Clement omit baptism in his explanation of salvation? Additionally, baptismal regeneration is neither mentioned by Ignatius in his seven epistles, nor by Polycarp or Mathetes.

At the same era Josephus seems to note that the Christians he knew did not teach baptismal regeneration. Although not a Christian, Josephus noted that Jewish Christians rejected baptismal regeneration: "*and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away of some sins, but for the purification of the body (Antiquities of the Jews, Book XVIII, Chapter 5.2)"*. This indicates that 1st-century Jewish Christians did not believe in baptismal regeneration.

Aristides (2nd century) Aristides makes a statement suggesting opposition to both baptismal regeneration and infant baptism: "*Further, if one or other of them have bondmen and bondwomen or children, through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. (The Apology of Aristdes, Translated by D.M. Kay. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 9.)*". Aristides implies that persuasion, not baptism, is the means of becoming a Christian, indicating he did not believe baptism was tied to salvation.

Treatise on Rebaptism (c. 250 AD) is an anonymous treatise from around 250 AD, which states: "*Even as Peter also subsequently most abundantly taught us about the same Gentiles, saying: And He put no difference between us and them, their hearts being purified by faith. Acts 15:9 And there will be no doubt that men may be baptized with the Holy Ghost without water — as you observe that these were baptized before they were baptized with water; that the announcements of both John and of our Lord Himself were satisfied — forasmuch as they received the grace of the promise both without the imposition of the apostle's hands and without the laver, which they attained afterwards. And their hearts being purified, God bestowed upon them at the same time, in virtue of their faith, remission of sins; so that the subsequent baptism conferred upon them this benefit alone, that they received also the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, that nothing might appear to be wanting to the integrity of their service and faith.*" (Treatise on Rebaptism). This text explicitly states that water baptism is not necessary for salvation, describing it as a public confession of Christ rather than a salvific act.

It is also noteworthy that Tertullian (155 - 220ad) explicitly refers to knowledge of individuals who rejected baptismal regeneration, as he wrote:

Here, then, those miscreants provoke questions. And so they say, Baptism is not necessary for them to whom faith is sufficient; for withal, Abraham pleased God by a sacrament of no water, but of faith. But in all cases it is the later things which have a conclusive

force, and the subsequent which prevail over the antecedent. Grant that, in days gone by, there was salvation by means of bare faith, before the passion and resurrection of the Lord. But now that faith has been enlarged, and has become a faith which believes in His nativity, passion, and resurrection, there has been an amplification added to the sacrament, viz., the sealing act of baptism; the clothing, in some sense, of the faith which before was bare, and which cannot exist now without its proper law. (On Baptism, Chapter 13)

Here, Tertullian encountered individuals who taught that baptism was not necessary for salvation, particularly pointing to those who argued that since Abraham was saved by faith alone, so too are we saved by faith without baptism. Although Tertullian conceded that Abraham was saved by faith alone, he argued that in the current age, salvation had been changed to include baptism as a necessary step. This explicitly showcases the existence of those who did not teach baptismal regeneration. However, it may be objected that Tertullian was primarily dealing with Cainitism in this treatise, and thus this would only reflect a Gnostic rejection of baptismal regeneration. Yet Tertullian often speaks of multiple groups in this treatise, not merely the Cainites, as previously shown in his discussion of infant baptism. And while Tertullian does criticize Gnosticism in this treatise, he never addresses Gnostic sects in chapter 12 in his description of baptismal regeneration.

Jovinian (c. 400 AD) Jovinian, an early church figure, also argued against baptismal regeneration. As Philip Schaff writes on Jovinian:

and makes a distinction between the mere baptism of water and the baptism of the Spirit, which involves also a distinction between the actual and the ideal church.(History of the Christian Church)

Thus, for Jovinian spiritual baptism was the means of salvation rather than water. These examples illustrate that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was not universally accepted in early Christianity, challenging the notion that it was a dominant belief until the 1500s.

Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism has been historically strongly connected to Free Grace theology, and has been the basis upon which Free Grace interpretations have been built upon. However, similarly to Free Grace theology, it has also been charged with the argument of novelty. However, we do also see traces of dispensational thought in early Christianity. We also find evidence that Papias (early 2nd century) held views resembling dispensationalism, as he appears to have interpreted Ezekiel 36 as referring to the millennial age rather than to the Church. Papias, a disciple of the Apostle John, preserved a saying concerning the Millennial age within his writings, that seems to strongly echo the text of Ezekiel 36. When we read Ezekiel 36, it clearly describes material and national blessings promised to Israel. Under covenant theology, even with covenantal premillennial views, this passage is interpreted as dealing with the church. However, Our understanding that Papias applied this prophecy to the millennium

comes from Irenaeus, who had access to Papias's writings and commented on them. Irenaeus stated that these promises were to be fulfilled in "those times"—a phrase he elsewhere uses to denote the millennial age. He records the following tradition, reportedly preserved from those who knew John the Apostle:

"The elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, remembered that they had heard from him how the Lord taught concerning those times, saying:

> *The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, 'I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me.' In like manner, He said, that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear would have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of pure, fine flour; and that apples, seeds, and grass would yield in similar abundance. All animals, feeding then only on the produce of the earth, would become peaceable and harmonious, being in perfect subjection to man." (Fragments of Papias)*

This imagery directly parallels Ezekiel 36:28–30, which states:

“Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.”

It therefore appears that Papias understood Ezekiel 36 as a prophecy to be fulfilled in the millennium, implying a future restoration of Israel.

Further confirmation of Papias’s literal millennial expectation comes from Eusebius, who summarizes his teaching as follows:

> *“Amongst these he says that there will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth. He moreover hands down, in his own writing, other narratives given by the previously mentioned Aristion of the Lord's sayings, and the traditions of the presbyter John.”*
> *(Eusebius, Church History)*

Thus, Papias’s testimony provides early evidence of a literal, earthly millennial reign and a future fulfillment of Israel’s promises, concepts closely aligned with later dispensational interpretations.

When we look at the early church, we find an illustrative example of dispensational thought in the figure of Nepos, a third-century Egyptian theologian. Nepos authored a work titled *Refutation of the Allegorisers*—now lost—but his views are preserved through

the writings of Eusebius. From these accounts, it is evident that Nepos employed a historical-grammatical hermeneutic, leading him to interpret the Old Testament's millennial prophecies in a literal manner. Eusebius describes this approach in his *Church History*:

> *"Besides all these the two books on the Promises were prepared by him. The occasion of these was Nepos, a bishop in Egypt, who taught that the promises to the holy men in the Divine Scriptures should be understood in a more Jewish manner, and that there would be a certain millennium of bodily luxury upon this earth." (Church History)*

From this, it is clear that Nepos did not teach historic premillennialism, as Eusebius explicitly notes that he interpreted the biblical promises "in a more Jewish manner." This distinguishes Nepos from historic premillennialists, who typically interpret the promises made to Israel allegorically, viewing them as symbolic of blessings for the church. In contrast, Nepos argued for a literal fulfillment of those promises, setting his position apart from the allegorical tradition.

The papacy

While not the primary point of this book, the authority claims of the papacy are a historical challenge against Free Grace theology. The Catholic church claims to have infallibly defined salvation through their supposed infallible tradition in a way that contradicts Free Grace theology. Thus, I will keep a brief chapter discussing

those claims from a historical viewpoint, demonstrating its lack of historical grounding.

Polycrates of Ephesus 2nd century

Polycrates wrote a letter against the bishop of Rome during the Quartodeciman controversy. Quartodecimanism was the belief that Easter must be kept at the same time as Moses commanded to keep the Passover to the Jews. This later evolved into a massive controversy, where the Roman bishop called the Quartodecimans heretical. It must be noted, however, that the Quartodecimans did not hold to keeping the Passover as the Jews did; they merely celebrated Easter at the same time as Passover. Polycrates wrote a letter in the name of the entire Eastern church against the pope, attempting to refute him:

“Moreover I also, Polycrates, who am the least of you all, in accordance with the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have succeeded-seven of my relatives were bishops, and I am the eighth, and my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven-I myself, brethren, I say, who am sixty-five years old in the Lord, and have fallen in with the brethren in all parts of the world, and have read through all Holy Scripture, am not frightened at the things which are said to terrify us. For those who are greater than I have said, "We ought to obey God rather than men.""

Polycrates clearly attacked the bishop of Rome when he wanted to declare the Quartodecimans as heretical, saying “we ought to

obey God rather than men”. This event is especially notable as Polycrates wrote in the name of the eastern churches representatively, he wrote in the name of Polycarp and Melito while seeing no contradiction with their views in standing against the views of the Roman church, and others such as Irenaeus sided against the Roman leaders, as Eusebius (265- 339) states:

Thereupon Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate. But this did not please all the bishops. And they besought him to consider the things of peace, and of neighborly unity and love. Words of theirs are extant, sharply rebuking Victor. Among them was Irenaeus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the "Lord's day" namely Easter. He fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom.

— Eusebius 1890, Book V Chapter 24

Irenaeus evidently did not see a contradiction in rebuking the pope for his actions.

Cyprian 3rd century

Cyprian is among the clearest examples of someone who denied the possibility of a central authority in the early church, as seen in his conflict during the controversy with Stephen of Rome over the issue of rebaptism. This is clearly seen in the Synod of Carthage and in his letters, where Cyprian stated:

"*For no one of us has set himself up to be bishop of bishops, or attempted with tyrannical dread to force his colleagues to obedience to him, since every bishop has, for the license of liberty and power, his own will, and as he cannot be judged by another, so neither can he judge another. But we await the judgment of our universal Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, who one and alone has the power, both of advancing us in the governance of his Church, and of judging of our actions in that position." and "For neither did Peter, whom first the Lord chose, and upon whom He built His Church, when Paul disputed with him afterwards about circumcision, claim anything to himself insolently, nor arrogantly assume anything; so as to say that he held the primacy, and that he ought rather to be obeyed by novices and those lately come. Nor did he despise Paul because he had previously been a persecutor of the Church."*

(Council of Carthage (A.D. 257) and Epistle 70)

Now, there does indeed exist an attempted answer to these clear quotes. Roman Catholics have attempted to argue that Cyprian changed his mind and affirmed the papacy later in his early life and prior to his death. Catholic apologists quote later Christians

saying that the North African churches decided to agree with Stephen, thus arguing that Cyprian submitted to the papacy. Although this might sound plausible, it is easily answered when we read the words of Augustine. Augustine stated that Cyprian would not have changed his mind unless a council had been called, thus clearly implying, as no such council took place, that Cyprian did remain in his position: “*Wherefore the holy Cyprian, whose dignity is only increased by his humility, who so loved the pattern set by Peter as to use the words, "Giving us thereby a pattern of concord and patience, that we should not pertinaciously love our own opinions, but should rather account as our own any true and rightful suggestions of our brethren and colleagues, for the common health and good," — he, I say, abundantly shows that he was most willing to correct his own opinion, if any one should prove to him that it is as certain that the baptism of Christ can be given by those who have strayed from the fold, as that it could not be lost when they strayed; on which subject we have already said much. Nor should we ourselves venture to assert anything of the kind, were we not supported by the unanimous authority of the whole Church, to which he himself would unquestionably have yielded”. (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV: Writings in Connection with the Donatist Controversy)*

Here, Augustine admits that Cyprian did not change his mind on his position, thus showing that Cyprian never accepted the position of Rome. This quote from Augustine also implies that a council held more authority than the bishop of Rome, since the testimony of the Roman bishop was not sufficient to settle a doctrinal matter. This also shows that, despite Cyprian opposing

the Roman bishop, Augustine believed it was proper to call Cyprian "holy." Augustine never used this kind of language for those he regarded as heretical

Next, that Cyprian did not change his mind from his early life can be seen from his epistle number 24, which was made prior to the controversy with Stephen, where Cyprian asserts that every bishop is a successor of Peter, and they all together rule over the Church: “*Our Lord, whose precepts and admonitions we ought to observe, describing the honour of a bishop and the order of His Church, speaks in the Gospel, and says to Peter: I say unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Thence, through the changes of times and successions, the ordering of bishops and the plan of the Church flow onwards; so that the Church is founded upon the bishops, and every act of the Church is controlled by these same rulers.”*

This shows that for Cyprian, the Church is ruled by the bishops together and not by one bishop, and no one bishop alone shares in succession of Peter, thus being consistent with his later statements denying Petrine supremacy.

Now there indeed exists letters where Cyprian speaks highly of Rome, however he never ascribes infallibility nor supremacy to the bishop of Rome, instead being comparable to the position of the Patriarch of Constantinople in Eastern Orthodoxy, being a “first among equals”. Cyprian clearly denied the existence of papal supremacy by stating: “*He gives an equal power, and says, As the Father has sent me, even so send I you: Receive the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins you remit, they shall be remitted unto him; and whose soever sins you retain, they shall be retained; yet, that He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one. Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honour and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity*.” (On the Unity of the Church.)

Cyprian consistently states that there exists no man who has ultimate and universal authority, and thus is a strong example of an early Christian whose words rule out Roman supremacy.

Firmilian 3rd century

Firmilian was an eastern Bishop living at the same time as Cyprian, we only have one writing left from Firmilian, however this writing is entirely devoted to attacking the bishop of Rome.

Firmilian joined Cyprian during his conflict with the Roman bishop, stating: *“But that they who are at Rome do not observe those things in all cases which are handed down from the beginning, and vainly pretend the authority of the apostles; any one may know also from the fact, that concerning the celebration of Easter,*

and concerning many other sacraments of divine matters, he may see that there are some diversities among them, and that all things are not observed among them alike, which are observed at Jerusalem, just as in very many other provinces also many things are varied because of the difference of the places and names. And yet on this account there is no departure at all from the peace and unity of the Catholic Church, such as Stephen has now dared to make; breaking the peace against you, which his predecessors have always kept with you in mutual love and honour, even herein defaming Peter and Paul the blessed apostles, as if the very men delivered this who in their epistles execrated heretics, and warned us to avoid them. Whence it appears that this tradition is of men which maintains heretics, and asserts that they have baptism, which belongs to the Church alone." (Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, to Cyprian, Against the Letter of Stephen. A.D. 256.)

Firmilian went so far as to call Stephen like a new Judas:

"Except that we may in this matter give thanks to Stephen, that it has now happened through his unkindness that we receive the proof of your faith and wisdom. But although we have received the favour of this benefit on account of Stephen, certainly Stephen has not done anything deserving of kindness and thanks. For neither can Judas be thought worthy by his perfidy and treachery wherewith he wickedly dealt concerning the Saviour, as though he had been the cause of such great advantages, that through him the world and the people of the Gentiles were delivered by the

Lord's passion." (Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, to Cyprian, Against the Letter of Stephen. A.D. 256.)

Roman Catholics may object that Firmilian was merely a schismatic and that his statements are therefore of less weight. They also may object that Firmilian's letter demonstrates that Stephen did claim papal power. However, there are no clear indications that Stephen claimed universal jurisdiction or infallibility, though he does appear to be highly concerned with his own status.

Regarding the first objection, Firmilian states that Stephen's claim was a complete novelty, not taught by previous bishops of Rome, saying: "*Rome do not observe those things in all cases which are handed down from the beginning*", secondly Stephen likely claimed a very high level of primacy, but not universal jurisdiction, Stephen clearly claimed some kind of authority, but there was no discussion of jurisdiction, there are no indications Stephen believed he had rights to universal jurisdiction in total. Additionally, bishops in the east even after Firmilian had died, held him in high esteem, Malchion stated concerning him "*and exhorted them to give their help in relieving us from this deadly doctrine; among these, we addressed, for instance, Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, and Firmilian of Cappadocia, those men of blessed name*." *(In Name of the Synod of Antioch, Against Paul of Samosata).* For Malchion to praise a heretic who opposed the system Christ supposedly set up is highly inconsistent. The letter of Malchion was also written in the name of the entire Synod of Antioch and none ever attacked Malchion for supporting a

supposed heretic, thus the early Church did not view Firmilian as a schismatic despite attacking Stephen.

Basil of Caesarea (4th century)

Basil of Caesarea came into conflict with the bishop of Rome during the Meletian schism. Rather than deferring to the Roman bishop's judgment, Basil made clear that he would not submit on the basis of the views of the Roman bishop alone, as he writes:

”and therefore I congratulate those who have received the letter from Rome. And, although it is a grand testimony in their favour, I only hope it is true and confirmed by facts. But I shall never be able to persuade myself on these grounds to ignore Meletius, or to forget the Church which is under him, or to treat as small, and of little importance to the true religion, the questions which originated the division. I shall never consent to give in, merely because somebody is very much elated at receiving a letter from men. Even if it had come down from heaven itself, but he does not agree with the sound doctrine of the faith, I cannot look upon him as in communion with the saints.” Letter 214

Furthermore, Basil's language is noticeable in its directness. He does not only express disagreement with the decision of the Roman bishop, but articulates a broader principle: that even a letter descending from heaven itself would carry no binding authority if its bearer did not hold to scriptural doctrine. In this

letter, Basil makes clear that the authority of a letter from Rome carries no weight in itself, and that scriptural agreement rather than the viewpoints of any bishopric, is the proper basis for communion.

Conclusion

Thus, while there are multiple similar episodes in early church history, these show a short sample of the difficulties with asserting universal papal authority in the early church.

The Reformation period (16th–17th centuries)

The Reformation-era was a major era of change within the history of Christianity, marked by debates on salvation, grace, and human responsibility. During this era which was caused by figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin, the concept of grace was a major issue of debate. While most denominations arising from the Reformation have not historically agreed with Free Grace theology, it should still be noted that such views were not totally foreign to this time period.

John Calvin

Free Grace theology today is often contrasted with Calvinism, as most of the strongest critics of Free Grace theology come from Calvinistic teachers. However, it should still be noted that John Calvin's view did not fully align with the modern Lordship salvation view, and surprisingly still seems to align himself on multiple points with Free Grace theology.

John Calvin, the first and principal figure of the Reformed movement, is widely regarded as the founder of Calvinism. However, there are multiple points on which John Calvin rejects the modern Lordship salvation doctrine. A major divergence between Calvin's own theology and Lordship salvation is that Calvin did not teach that turning from sin is a necessary precondition for salvation. While he defined repentance as an "inner turning from sin," he clearly denied that it functions as a condition for receiving eternal life.

Commenting on 2 Corinthians 7:10, Calvin wrote:

> *"To salvation Paul seems to make repentance the ground of salvation.* ***Were it so, it would follow, that we are justified by works****. I answer, that we must observe what Paul here treats of, for he is not inquiring as to the ground of salvation, but simply commending repentance from the fruit which it produces." (John Calvin, Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7:10)*

In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin also emphasized that repentance flows from faith, rather than preceding it:

> *"There are some, however, who suppose that repentance precedes faith, rather than flows from it, or is produced by it as fruit from a tree. Such persons have never known the power of repentance, and are moved to feel this way by an unduly slight argument." (Institutes, 3.3.1)*

For me, it was a highly surprising thing to see John Calvin himself call the idea that one must turn from all their sins prior to salvation

a gospel of salvation by works, and although Calvin's view cannot be categorized as Free Grace theology, it is very notable how strongly he rejected the claim that turning from sin is a condition of justification. Calvin taught that repentance, although understood as an inward turning from sin, is not necessary to receive Christ. This parallels, in part, the position of Zane Hodges, who likewise held that repentance (also defined as an inner change regarding sin) is not a condition of receiving everlasting life. However, unlike Calvin, Zane Hodges did not believe that it would be inevitable.

Unlike modern Lordship salvation advocates, Calvin also strongly opposed any teaching that compromised assurance of salvation by shifting focus from Christ's finished work to the believer's own performance. He wrote:

> *"We do not thus accept that most pestilent philosophy which certain half-papists are furtively beginning to fashion today. For because they cannot defend that rude doubt which has been handed down in the schools, they take refuge in another fiction: that they may make an assurance mingled with unbelief. Whenever we look upon Christ, they confess that we find full occasion for good hope in him. But because we are always unworthy of all those benefits which are offered to us in Christ, they would have us waver and hesitate at the sight of our unworthiness." (Institutes, 3.2.24)*

My point here is not to claim John Calvin as someone who affirmed Free grace theology, however in some important aspects

he strongly rejected the views of modern Lordship salvation advocates.

Anabaptism

Anabaptism was a part of the ‘radical reformation’, known for their rejection of infant baptism. Although it was a very broad movement, it in many ways foreshadowed many Evangelical views, such as in holding to a congregational church polity, rejection of infant baptism, emphasis on evangelism and by rejecting state churches. Notably also, the doctrine of eternal security seems to have appeared within the Anabaptist movement. This is seen in the Lutheran Augsburg confession, which states in Article XII:

> *"They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin."*

The Lutherans were strongly opposed to the doctrine of eternal security, and this is among the reasons for why the Lutherans sought to condemn the early Anabaptists. Although modern Anabaptism leans towards an Arminian view of salvation, evidently there was a sizable amount of Anabaptists in the 1500s who taught eternal security.
Other evidence of eternal security within Anabaptism comes from Lutheran polemical writings, which although hostile, may indicate a form of eternal security which is not tied to perseverance:

Source: Process, wie es soll gehalten werden mit den Widertäuffern, p.6-8

> *“Cannot fall back into God's wrath / and if they commit adultery / they say / they are driven by the Spirit in this way.”*

Although this text may initially appear heretical, it is actually a Lutheran polemical work against Anabaptism written by Lutheran theologians in 1557. In this work, the Lutherans argued that Anabaptists should be condemned for their beliefs and that civil authorities should punish and execute them. This particular section addresses the Anabaptist doctrine of eternal security, which the Lutherans condemned as heresy. The portion concerning adultery is likely a Lutheran interpolation meant to critique what the Lutherans incorrectly perceived as the implications of the Anabaptist view on eternal security. The Lutheran theologians erroneously concluded that such a doctrine implied that when a person sins gravely, they do so while being driven by the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit cannot be lost once a person has been justified. They seem to have thought that this would mean the Holy Spirit accompanies believers even in their sins. Although this conclusion is incorrect, during the Reformation and the persecution of Anabaptists, there was little effort to accurately represent opposing beliefs.

However, Anabaptism was not a unified movement, and its adherents held a wide range of beliefs on various issues, including salvation. Even those Anabaptists who opposed the

doctrine of eternal security were aware of its existence, as evidenced in the writings of Leupold Scharnschlager:

> *Even today some understand Christ and Paul as ascribing righteousness and life to faith alone, as if a faith without deeds and fruit is enough for salvation. For how can it be a barren, that is, a dead faith, when life—and much more—comes forth from it? (Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XIII: Hebrews, James. Edited by Ronald K. Rittgers. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017, p. 233)*

Despite Leupold Scharnschlager's disagreement with the doctrine, his writings acknowledge its existence, stating, "even today some understand." This demonstrates that Free Grace theology was present in the early 16th century.

Antinomianism

Antinomianism is a term that literally means “against law”. This was a widely applied term during the Reformation, and was primarily targeted towards those who rejected the necessity of good works in salvation during the Reformation. This term has continued its modern usage, and is often used as an insult towards those who teach Free Grace theology. However, it is evident that multiple individuals with similar views of salvation labelled ‘antinomian’ seem to have existed during the Reformation. These groups were condemned by most Lutherans, pejoratively labelled as "Antinomian”, as Friedrich Bente writes:

> *It is true, however, that the Antinomians (who will be dealt with more extensively in a following chapter) as well as several other opponents of the Majorists were unwilling to allow the statement,"Good works are necessary." Falsely interpreting the proposition as necessarily implying, not merely moral obligation, but also compulsion and coercion, they rejected it as unevangelical and semipopish. The word "must" is here not in place, they protested. Agricola, as well as the later Antinomians (Poach and Otto), rejected the expressions "necessarium, necessary" and "duty, debitum (Bente, Friedrich (2005). Historical Introductions to the Lutheran Confessions: As Contained in the Book of Concord of 1580. Concordia Publishing House. ISBN 978-0-7586-0921-2.)*

One of these individuals named as denying that good works are necessary for the Christian was Johannes Agricola (1494 – 1566) who was initially a companion of Luther but became separated from his teaching.

Free Grace-like views were also later on advocated in the "Antinomian controversy" within the 1600s American Colonies. Cotton, the leading figure in the Antinomian controversy taught the doctrine of assurance, denying that good works are necessary for our assurance. Cotton and other "Antinomians" (also called "opinionists") protested the idea that our assurance should be placed in any way (even subordinately) in our good works.

> "Trulie it is hard to perceive [between a temporary believer and a true believer] when men differ, and therefore it is not

> an easie matter to make such use of sanctification, as by it to beare witnesse unto justification"

Thus, while Free Grace theology was not the majority view in the Reformation, there certainly were advocates of such a view during this era.

Post-Reformation era (18th to 20th centuries)

After the Reformation, many groups and individuals continued to debate the relationship between faith and works, a tension that persisted long after the Protestant reformation. In 18th-century Scotland, this debate found renewed expression in several theological disputes, among which the Sandemanian and Marrow controversies stand out as particularly influential. Both movements emerged in response to what their proponents perceived as a growing emphasis on moral performance and human effort within Christianity, particularly Reformed theology.

The Marrow Controversy

The Marrow controversy was a debate over faith and works that happened in the Church of Scotland. This was ignited by the Auchterarder Creed written in 1717, which simply stated "*It is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ*". This however ignited a strong controversy in the Scottish church, and those who defended the original statement of the Auchterarder became called the 'Marrow

brethren'. Among those who defended the Marrow Brethren was Thomas Boston, who strongly argued that forsaking sin was not necessary to receive Christ:

> *Though the patrons of the doctrine of the necessity of repentance in order to the obtaining of the pardon of sin, do not aim at any encroachment on the doctrine of free pardon; yet, with all deference to those learned men, I conceive, that* ***such doctrine is injurious to the grace of God, and doth much darken the free pardon offered in the gospel****, in regard the pardon is promised immediately to those that believe, Acts 10:43. "Through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins." But they require, that believers bring something with them, if they would obtain it, even that they bring repentance along with them. (THOMAS BOSTON, The Whole Works of Thomas Boston: Sermons and Discourses on Several Important Subjects in Divinity)*

In the end, the church of Scotland decided against the Marrow Brethren, however they still influenced a number of later writers, such as John Colquhoun (1748-1827), who stated:

> *How then can his repentance atone for his iniquities, or entitle him to the favour of God and to the happiness of heaven? How can that evangelical repentance, which he is incapable of exercising till after his sins be all forgiven on the ground of an infinite atonement imputed to him, make atonement for them? How can that true repentance, which he cannot exercise until in justification he be already entitled*

> *to eternal life, entitle him to eternal life? Does not the consummate righteousness of Jesus Christ, imputed for justification, entitle the believer fully to it? What need is there, then, that his repentance should entitle him? (John Colquhoun, Evangelical Repentance)*

However, the Marrow Brethren still diverged from Free Grace in a number of ways, particularly by still affirming the perseverance of the saints (although in softer form). Thus, while the Marrow Brethren were a reaction against a form of Lordship salvation (then named 'neonomianism'), they did not fully affirm Free Grace theology.

Sandemanianism

Sandemanianism was an 18th century non-conformist movement within Scotland, which was named after Robert Sandeman. Sandeman particularly came into conflict with the Reformed theologians of his time, particularly due to his emphasis on 'bare faith' as the basis of justification, writing: 'AsThence it will appear that justification comes by bare faith'. However, the controversy concerning Sandemanianism was more strongly ignited by a Scotch Baptist named Archibald McLean, who was influenced by Sandeman's thought. McLean strongly denied that holy dispositions are a pre-condition of salvation, arguing that repentance in the Bible is a change of mind about Christ, writing the following:

> *"I can admit that when faith first takes place in the mind, it imports repentance, or a change of mind, as the word*

metanoia signifies. It is a change from darkness to light; from blindness, prejudice and unbelief, to a spiritual perception and conviction of the truth; and it is by convincing men of the truth concerning Jesus, that the Spirit convinceth them of sin, because they believe not in him. “ (A Reply to Mr. Fuller’s Appendix to his Book on The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation)

McLean similarly wrote against the claim that pious exercises of heart are how we receive Christ, writing that such views are contrary to Biblical teachings of grace:

“Now, when men include in the very nature of justifying faith such good dispositions, holy affections and pious exercises of heart as the moral law requires, and so make them necessary (no matter under what consideration) to a sinner's acceptance with God, it perverts the Apostle's doctrine upon this important subject, and makes justification to be at least " as it were by the works of the law." (The commission given by Jesus Christ to his apostles illustrated).”

However, this teaching was radically opposed by Reformed theologians, particularly Andrew Fuller, who wrote strongly against this teaching. The views of Andrew Fuller strongly resembled modern Lordship salvation, who argued that obedience to Christ was a prerequisite of salvation, writing the following: ‘*In like manner, faith is not only the root of all other obedience, but is itself an exercise of obedience*.’ (Strictures on Sandemanianism). However, this position is completely anti-Biblical, as the Bible presents works and faith as opposites,

to make faith an act of obedience to the law is to say that we are saved by the law, which is what Paul condemns as heresy.

Isaac Watts (1674 - 1748)

Isaac Watts is often considered an early “proto-dispensationalist”, and he was mentioned by Charles Ryrie as one who foreshadowed the dispensationalism of Scofield and Darby. Isaac Watts wrote a book called "*The Harmony of All the Religions Which God Ever Prescribed to Men and All His Dispensations Towards Them*", where he taught many dispensational concepts. Isaac's song "Jesus Shall Reign" has been generally seen as proof of his premillennial theology, which reads thus:

1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does its successive journeys run, his kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more. 2 To him shall endless prayer be made, and praises throng to crown his head. His name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice.3 People and realms of every tongue dwell on his love with sweetest song, and infant voices shall proclaim their early blessings on his name. 4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns: the prisoners leap to lose their chains, the weary find eternal rest, and all who suffer want are blest. 5 Let every creature rise and bring the highest honors to our King, angels descend with songs again, and earth repeat the loud amen.

While the hymn draws heavily from Psalm 72, Watts's additions are theologically significant. The line "*His name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice*" is not present in the original psalm. Its inclusion suggests Watts envisioned a

restored sacrificial system, an element absent from the present age but consistent with Ezekiel's temple vision and the millennial reign. This interpretive addition implies that Watts resembled a literal fulfillment of the millennial promises in a future dispensation.

Further evidence of his premillennial outlook appears in a hymn based on Isaiah 9:6 (Psalms and Hymns, p. 300), where Watts describes the millennial reign as belonging to "*ages yet unknown*." He also affirmed a future restoration of national Israel. In his remarks on Psalms 105 and 106, Watts writes:

"Though the Jews now seem to be cast off, yet the Apostle Paul assures us, that “God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew” (Rom. 11:2). Their unbelief and absence from God is but for a season; for they shall be recalled again, verses 25, 26"

"Then let the world forbear its rage, Nor put the land in fear; Israel must live through every age, And be the’ Almighty’s care."

While premillennialism alone does not constitute dispensationalism, Watts's insistence on the enduring national identity of Israel and his apparent expectation of a literal future temple distinguish him from historic premillennialists, who typically interpret such temple imagery allegorically and apply it to the Church.

Finally, Watts explicitly identifies the Church Age as beginning at Pentecost. In The Harmony of All the Religions, he states:

"the christian dispensation was not properly set up in all its forms, doctrines and duties, till the following day of Pentecost, and the pouring down of the Spirit upon the Apostles"

Though it must be noted that Isaac Watts cannot entirely be called a dispensationalist, and he was still influenced by covenant theology. Nevertheless, he sometimes approached a dispensational understanding of Scripture. Beyond his framework of redemptive eras, Watts's soteriology at times also anticipated elements of Free Grace theology. Consider his remarks on justification:

"Neither the acts of love, or zeal, or repentance, or fear, or worship, or any other acts of obedience, are appointed as means of our justification, because these actions carry in them an appearance of our doing something for God, our answering the demands of some law; and this would make our justification by a law of works." (Isaac Watts (Sermons Vol II, 551)

The inclusion of "repentance" in this list is particularly striking. Within Watts's Calvinistically influenced milieu, repentance was generally understood not as a mere change of mind but as a decision to turn from sin. However, he nevertheless denies that such a decisive act is necessary to receive salvation, emphasizing purely the act of receiving through faith salvation:

Thus our acceptance with God arising from faith and not works, none have any reason to glory in the presence of God: Justification by faith cuts off all boasting. And indeed this seems

to be one main design of the blessed God, in appointing our justification under all the dispensations of the covenant of grace, to be obtained not by works but by faith, or trust in free mercy, viz. that since pride and self-sufficiency was one great spring of the first sin and ruin of mankind; this pride of man might be humbled, that no flesh should ever have the least ground (Isaac Waats (Sermons Vol II, 551)

Early dispensationalism

Although many theologians and religious teachers prior to John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) expressed ideas resembling what would later be called dispensationalism, it was Darby's teachings that crystallized these ideas into a coherent system, forming the foundation of the modern Dispensational movement. This movement, in turn, became an influential framework for the development and spread of Free Grace theology. Darby himself held views that were, in several respects, compatible with Free Grace principles, particularly regarding the believer's assurance of salvation. For example, he wrote: "*My sins are borne away already, and my title to glory just as perfect as when I get there. "We have redemption through his blood." The consequence of knowing I have it, is that I can walk with God.*" (Lost or Saved, Darby). Here, Darby emphasizes that the certainty of salvation is already secured in Christ through his blood, and that the believer's awareness of this security enables our obedient walk with God.

The focus on assurance of salvation was not unique to Darby; it was a characteristic of many early dispensationalist authors.

dispensationalism created a framework which allowed for a careful distinction between salvation and rewards. By interpreting biblical passages that discuss good works as referring to eternal rewards rather than salvation itself, early Dispensationalists were able to distinguish eternal salvation from eternal reward. In this way, dispensationalism provided a system for understanding Scripture in a way that was able to emphasize good works, without needing to ground our assurance in them. As a result, we see a strong emphasis on assurance among these early Dispensational authors, whose views often aligned with tenets of Free Grace theology:

James Hall Brookes (1830 – 1897)

> Take the text, “He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him.” (1 John 3:24.) This cannot give assurance; for every true Christian, unless deluded by Satan, will confess that he fails to observe them in many particulars; that when he would do good evil is present with him; and that ‘no mere man, since the fall, is able, in this life, perfectly to keep (The Way Made Plain)

Charles Henry Mackintosh 1820 – 1896

> They are looking for what they can never find. They are seeking for a ground of peace in a sanctified nature instead of in a perfect sacrifice—in a progressive work of holiness instead of in a finished work of atonement. They deem it presumptuous to believe that their sins are forgiven until their evil nature is completely sanctified; and, seeing that this end is not reached, they have no settled assurance of

pardon, and are therefore miserable. (Sanctification: What Is It?)

Cyrus Scofield (1843 – 1921)

Assurance is the believer's full conviction that, through the work of Christ alone, received by faith, he is in possession of a salvation in which he will be eternally kept. And this assurance rests only upon the Scripture promises to him who believes. (Scofield's Reference Notes)

D. L Moody (1837 – 1899)

There is no doubt about assurance in the Word of God. A person said to me some time ago: "I think it is a great presumption for a person to say she is saved." I asked her if she was saved. "I belong to a Church," she sobbed. "But are you saved?" "I believe it would be presumption for me to say that I was saved." "Well, I think it is a greater presumption for any one to say: 'I don't know if I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' because it is written, "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." [Jn. 6:47.] It is clearly stated that we have assurance (Anecdotes and Illustrations)

Among these however the most notable example would be Cyrus Scofield, whose views on multiple points agreed with that of Free Grace theology. Scofield is one of the most famous dispensationalist authors, and he was also a friend of Lewis Sperry Chafer, who was a primary influence on the modern Free Grace movement.

And indeed, we can find statements made by Scofield that do agree with Free Grace theology.

Scofield held to the "change of mind" view of repentance, we find multiple references to this in his Reference Bible:

> it is evident, from a study of all the passages, that the sacred writers use it in the sense of metanoia in the N.T.—a change of mind. See Mt. 3. 2; Acts 17. 30, note. As in the N.T., such change of mind is often accompanied by contrition and self-judgment. When applied to God the word is used phenomenally according to O.T. custom. God seems to change His mind. The phenomena are such as, in the case of a man, would indicate a change of mind.

Also saying:

> This change of mind may, especially in the case of Christians who have fallen into sin, be preceded by sorrow (2 Cor. 7. 8-11), but sorrow for sin, though it may "work" repentance, is not repentance.

As previously mentioned, the dispensational system advocated by Scofield created the incentive to take the rewards interpretation of many passages, which he advocated for in his writings:

> 1 Corinthians 3:14. God, in the N.T. Scriptures, offers to the lost, salvation, and, for the faithful service of the saved, rewards. The passages are easily distinguished by remembering that salvation is invariably spoken of as a free

> gift (e.g. John 4:10; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8, 9); while rewards are earned by works (Mt. 10:42; Lk. 19:17; 1 Cor. 9:24, 25; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Rev. 2:10; 22:12). A further distinction is that salvation is a present possession (Lk. 7:50; John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47), while rewards are a future attainment, to be given at the coming of the Lord (Mt. 16:27; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12).

However, besides this, he is known to have explicitly made the distinction between carnal and spiritual Christians, writing:

> *“The regenerate man is not "in [the sphere of] the flesh," but in [the sphere of] the Spirit Rom 8:9 but the flesh is still in him, and he may, according to his choice, "walk after the flesh" or "in the Spirit" 1Cor 3:1-4 Gal 5:16,17. In the first case he is a "carnal," in the second a "spiritual," Christian. Victory over the flesh will be the habitual experience of the believer who walks in the Spirit Rom 8:2,4 Gal 5:16,17.” (Scofield notes on Jude)*

Similarly to Scofield, another contemporary Dispensationalist, Harry Ironside (1876 - 1951) often took stances close to Free Grace theology, explicitly rejecting the Lordship salvation view in his writings:

> *WHEN THE REVIVALIST comes promising salvation to those “who make a full surrender” of all that they have to God, and who “pay the price of full salvation,” he is preaching another gospel, for the price was paid on Calvary’s cross and the work that saves is finished. It was*

> *Christ Jesus who made the full surrender, when He yielded Himself unto death for us that we might be redeemed from the curse of the broken law and forever saved from the judgment to come upon all who refuse His grace. (“Another Gospel?” by Harry A. Ironside)*

The Plymouth Brethren are particularly notable among early dispensationalists, as they were highly influenced directly by the teachings of Darby. However, among the Brethren, Free Grace theology was apparently common.

For example, the "change of mind" view of repentance was very common in this group, as we see in the Bible translation of John Bowers (a 19th century Plymouth Brethren):

> *"And saying, Change your mind, for the reign of the heavens has drawn nigh." (Matthew 3:2)*
>
> *"From that time Jesus began to proclaim, and say, Change your minds, for the reign of the heavens has drawn nigh." (Matthew 4:17)*
>
> *"And that a change of mind and remission of sins should be proclaimed in his name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47)*
>
> *"And Peter said to them, Change your minds, and be each of you immersed, upon the name of Jesus Christ, into remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," (Acts 2:38)*

"Change your mind therefore, and turn, that your sins may be blotted out, that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

"That therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, he now commands all men everywhere to change their minds:" (Acts 17:30)

"But to those in Damascus first, and Jerusalem, and in all the country of Judea, and to the nations, I declared that they should change their minds and turn to God, and perform works worthy of their change of mind." (Acts 26:20)

Bowes was so strong in this view that repentance is a change of mind, that he directly translated "metanoia" as a change of mind, instead of using the word "repentance". We find the same view in Alexander Marshall (1846 – 1928), who could also be seen as a Plymouth Free Grace theologian, he wrote:

“But does it not say, unless we repent we shall perish?” Yes ; but what do you think is the Scriptural signification of “repentance?” If you say “sorrow for sin,” you are wrong. It does not mean sorrow for sin ; it means a change of mind see Matt. xxi.29" (God's way of salvation)

In the same writing, Marshall also makes comments such as the quality of faith not being the issue in salvation:

"If you are not already saved, you don’t believe in Jesus in any way. Scripture does not recognize two ways of believing— a “ right ” and a“ wrong ” one. Men may speak about a “ living faith ” and a “ dead faith,” a “saving faith ” and an “intellectual faith,” but Scripture speaks of believing what

> *God says. Faith in man and faith in God are the same exercises of mind ; the difference is not in the faith, but in the person on whom the faith terminates. Those who are lost perish through believing the devil's lie, and those who are saved are delivered through believing God's truth. "" (God's way of salvation)*

Thus for Marshall, simple trust in Christ is enough.

Free Grace views were also held by G.H. Lang (1874 – 1958) and G. H Pember (1837–1910), for example Lang argued that the "call to discipleship" is not of salvation:

> *Obviously this [Luke 17:33] agrees exactly with the warnings already considered that believers may be cut short by premature death and thus lose their life. It will therefore harmonize with the Lord's words should our passage [Heb 10:39] be rendered, "we are of them who have faith unto the keeping safe of life." (The Epistle to the Hebrews)*

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Baptists

Thomas Ross in his article "Historic Baptist Doctrine, Receiving Christ as both Savior and Lord or the So-Called Lordship Salvation, and the So-Called Free Grace Gospel" argued that no Baptists prior to the ministry of Jack Hyles in the 1950s taught Free Grace theology, quoting multiple Baptist confessions which do affirm Lordship salvation. Ross is a staunch proponent of Lordship Salvation and has asserted that any church identifying as *Baptist* while teaching Free Grace theology stands outside the true churches of Christ. He has argued that Baptists, before the

rise of Jack Hyles in the 1950s, unanimously affirmed Lordship Salvation. However, the claim that no Baptist taught Free Grace views is historically inaccurate. A notable example is Archibald MacLean (1733–1812) (as already also discussed under Sandemanianism), who wrote: *"Now, when men include in the very nature of justifying faith such good dispositions, holy affections and pious exercises of heart as the moral law requires, and so make them necessary (no matter under what consideration) to a sinner's acceptance with God, it perverts the Apostle's doctrine upon this important subject, and makes justification to be at least " as it were by the works of the law."* (The commission given by Jesus Christ to his apostles illustrated). Similar non-Lordship views seem to have been held by the Irish Baptist Alexander Carson (1776 – 1844), who argued that salvation is simply by faith, and not about the excellence/quality of the faith, stating: *"They who speak of salvation being by faith, on account of the excellence of faith itself, are virtually on the same foundation with those who preach salvation directly by works."* (Carson, Letters to the Author of “Evangelical Preaching,” 37; idem, Works 1:354.).

Another person who lived slightly later to note is Robert Govett (1813 – 1901) who although was influenced by the Plymouth Brethren, was also closely associated with British Baptists, and his conversion out of Anglicanism was primarily caused by him witnessing a Baptist baptism, also later being immersed in that same Baptist church. Robert Govett is often seen as an early Free Grace theologian, strongly emphasizing the distinction of reward and grace, arguing that true Christians can live carnally,

as he states in the introduction of his book "Entrance into the kingdom":

The propositions intended to be proved in the present pages are two.
1. That eternal life is God's unconditional gift TO believers.
2. That believers' participation in the kingdom OF Christ is conditional on their conduct, as good or evil. (Entrance into the kingdom)

Thus, Govett argued that while every believer will be saved even if they are carnal, yet their reward of the reign in the kingdom is by works, as he later stated:

In considering the difference between the conditions on which eternal life, and the kingdom of God respectively are set, the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the third chapter of Philippians is very important. Let us contemplate it then.

However, Govett took these concepts too far by arguing that the *millennium itself* is a reward, which unfaithful believers would miss, although they would still get to enjoy the new earth in eternity. Nevertheless, Govett did not teach Lordship salvation as he taught that believers who did not have a clean conduct would spend eternity with God.

Even closer to our time, John R. Rice, a Baptist pastor who began his ministry in 1926, expressed views that align closely with Free Grace theology, well before Jack Hyles came to believe in similar ideas. Rice strongly affirmed the dual nature of the believer and the reality of carnal Christians, emphasizing that salvation does

not automatically result in a transformed life without discipleship and spiritual growth. He wrote:

Now a Christian should live a consecrated Christian life but that does not automatically follow. People who are saved will find, like Paul, "When I would do good, evil is present with me . . . . So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:21,25).

Every saved person still has the old carnal nature and often-times has the same kind of temptation he had before. Some people who have truly been born again have a desperate fight to quit tobacco, and some have never seemed to get the victory over that or other bad habits. Some Christians have never learned to trust the Lord enough to bring tithes and offerings, and some have never learned to win souls. When a baby is born, he is not born grown. Being born is one thing; growing is another thing entirely.

So the thing to do is to take for granted that people are saved when they trust Christ for salvation.

SOURCE: Dr. Rice... Here Are More Questions, by John R. Rice, pg. 76,77, Sword of the Lord Publishers; ISBN: 0-87398-157-X

Another person to note is Ben M. Bogard (1868–1951) who was a prominent Landmark Baptist and the founder of the American Baptist Association. Nevertheless, in certain respects, his views on eternal security closely aligned with the Free Grace understanding of assurance and perseverance in his debate with Eugene S. Smith (the following quotes are from Smith-Bogard Debate (May 12–15, 1942). A Discussion Between Eugene S.

Smith (Christian) and Ben M. Bogard (Baptist). Held in Dallas, Texas.)

For instance, when Smith accused Bogard of preaching a doctrine of comfort rather than emphasizing sanctification as the basis of assurance, similar to John MacArthur's teachings, Bogard firmly defended his belief in assurance:

"Well,— now, my friend said Bogard preaches the doctrine of assurance and safety. Yes, sir. In Hebrews 6:18-19, where it says that by 'two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong assurance — strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.' A thing that is sure is not uncertain. A thing that is sure is not unstable. The idea of saying a thing is sure and yet not sure. I preach the doctrine of assurance, indeed I do. Why, he said, I preach, me and my people, Smith and his people preach the doctrine of scare."

Bogard further emphasized his belief in eternal security by expressing the horror he would feel if salvation could be lost:

"I would be the most miserable man on earth if I thought that I might go to sleep tonight and wake up in the morning in hell, because maybe I did something wrong today, unforgiven."

In contrast, Smith argued that those who fall into sin could lose their salvation, suggesting that eternal security would mean God allows sin without consequence. Bogard, however, responded

that while sin has consequences, it does not result in the loss of salvation. He argued that God disciplines believers in this life rather than revoking their salvation:

"How could he lose it? Well, you say, 'Hold on here— won't God punish them? Won't some people die in sin?' Well, I believe that even a preacher sometimes may be put to death on account of sin. Wasn't Moses put to death because he sinned? Yes, sir, God said, 'You shan't enter into Palestine because you sinned.' But Moses went to heaven— he was punished in the flesh for the sins of the flesh."

Bogard also affirmed that Christians who fall into doctrinal error are still saved:

"Well, some erred concerning the faith, made mistakes concerning the faith— don't say they lost salvation."

One of the most intriguing aspects of Bogard's theology is his interpretation of Hebrews 6. He rejected both the Arminian belief that salvation could be lost and the Calvinist view that the passage refers to false professors. Instead, he took an approach similar to Charles Ryrie, arguing that the passage presents a hypothetical scenario:

"Hebrews six— 'If they fell away after they once received the truth and tasted the good word of God and the power of the world to come, it is impossible to renew them again, unto repentance.' That's a fact. If they fall away— but the ninth verse said following, 'But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things

that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.' There were some who thought they could fall from grace, and Paul said, 'If you should fall away you never could get it back.'"

While I believe there are stronger ways to interpret Hebrews 6, it is noteworthy that Bogard did not view the passage as referring to false converts.

In conclusion, while Bogard's theology does not align entirely with Free Grace theology, his emphasis on assurance and eternal security bears significant similarities. His teachings reflect a strong tradition within Baptist circles of emphasizing the believer's security in Christ—though not without inconsistencies. Nonetheless, his stance on salvation provides an interesting historical perspective on the development of assurance-focused theology among Baptists.

Noteworthy are also the Primitive Baptists, who are an idiosyncratic group of Baptists which arose from the controversy between Baptists in the early 1800s on missionary boards, tract societies and temperance societies (though they themselves claim succession from the apostles). Primitive Baptists are often viewed as "hyper-Calvinistic" by individuals outside them, though Primitive Baptists resist the title of Calvinism. However, although they do not teach Free Grace theology, they surprisingly agree on the sanctificational idea within Free Grace, that someone may be genuinely regenerate yet live in carnality or even apostasy. However, they take it further by denying that someone is actually saved eternally from hell through faith. The similarities however can be seen in Primitive Baptists often taking similar position on

the “problem passages” as Free Grace theologians do, such as in James 2:

This does not mean that true faith is dead until works bring it to life, as some seem to construe it. James is here writing of showing charity to the needy, and very truly declares that to believe without acting would be a dead thing. If one believes and does not put his faith into activity, it is like the miser’s money while locked up in his chest. The money may be all right, but it will not be useful for practical business if it lies idle. So a man’s faith will be of no practical benefit while it is not coupled with obedience. (Zion’s Advocate, Vol. 44, №12, December 1905, John R. Daily)

20th century

While this book is primarily meant to deal with the earlier precursors of Free Grace theology, however as the movement stands today was most influenced by the 20th century, particularly by those who came from Dallas Theological Seminary, which was established by Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871 - 1952). Chafer particularly emphasized in his views the change of mind view of repentance, the possibility of a carnal Christian and eternal security, writing: “*The word metanoia is in every instance translated repentance. The word means a change of mind. The common practice of reading into this word the thought of sorrow and heart-anguish is responsible for much confusion in the field of Soteriology. There is no reason why sorrow should not accompany repentance or lead to repentance, but the sorrow, whatever it may be, is not repentance. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, it is*

said that "godly sorrow worketh repentance," that is, it leads on to repentance; but the sorrow is not to be mistaken for the change of mind which it may serve to produce. The son cited by Christ as reported in Matthew 21:28-29 who first said "I will not go," and afterward repented and went, is a true example of the precise meaning of the word." (Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (1947), Dallas Seminary Press). Chafer strongly resisted the doctrine of "eradication", which asserted that upon regeneration, our old nature no longer exists in us, writing also: *"The two theories are irreconcilable. We are either to be delivered by the abrupt removal of all tendency to sin and so no longer need the enabling power of God to combat the power of sin, or we are to be delivered by the immediate and constant power of the indwelling Spirit. The Bible evidently*
teaches the latter" (He That Is Spiritual, 1918).

Chafer's views were highly influential at Dallas Theological Seminary, shaping later major figures such as Charles Ryrie, Zane Hodges, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, and Robert Thieme. Ryrie and Hodges, in particular, became key voices in the Lordship salvation controversy, responding to John MacArthur's books that defended the Lordship salvation position.

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